

The Antebellum South: Life in a Slave Society



The Death of Slavery?

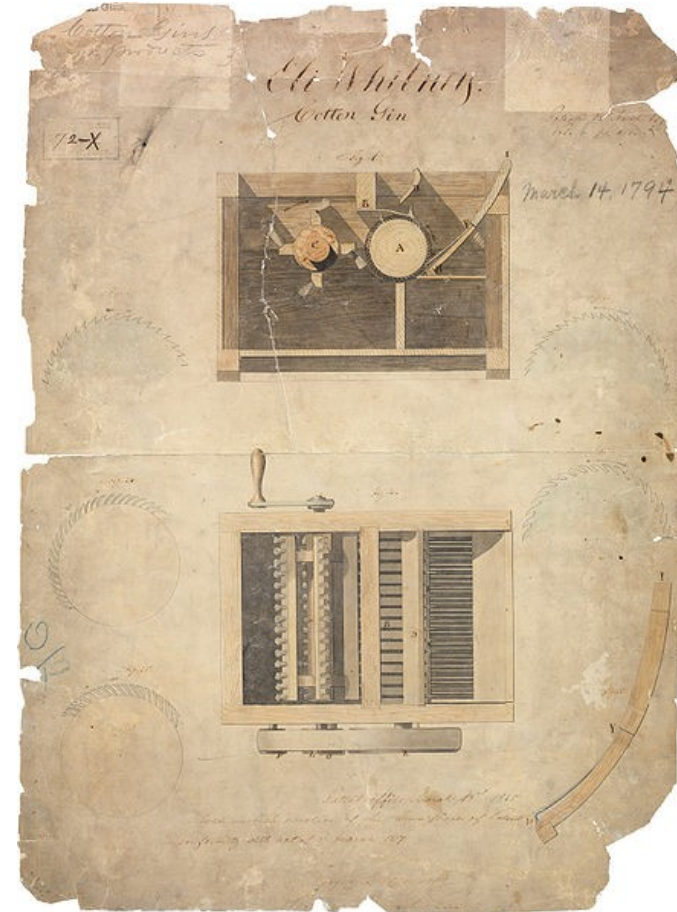
- As of the Revolution, slavery was concentrated in the areas around Virginia and South Carolina.
- Many (and perhaps most) Americans believed after the Revolution that slavery should and would end.
- Why didn't it?



Concentration of enslaved people in the US in 1790.

The Cotton Revolution

- Demand for cotton was surging with the industrial revolution.
- In 1793, a new cotton gin was invented that allowed the easy cleaning of cotton.
- Cotton plantations spread rapidly across the South.

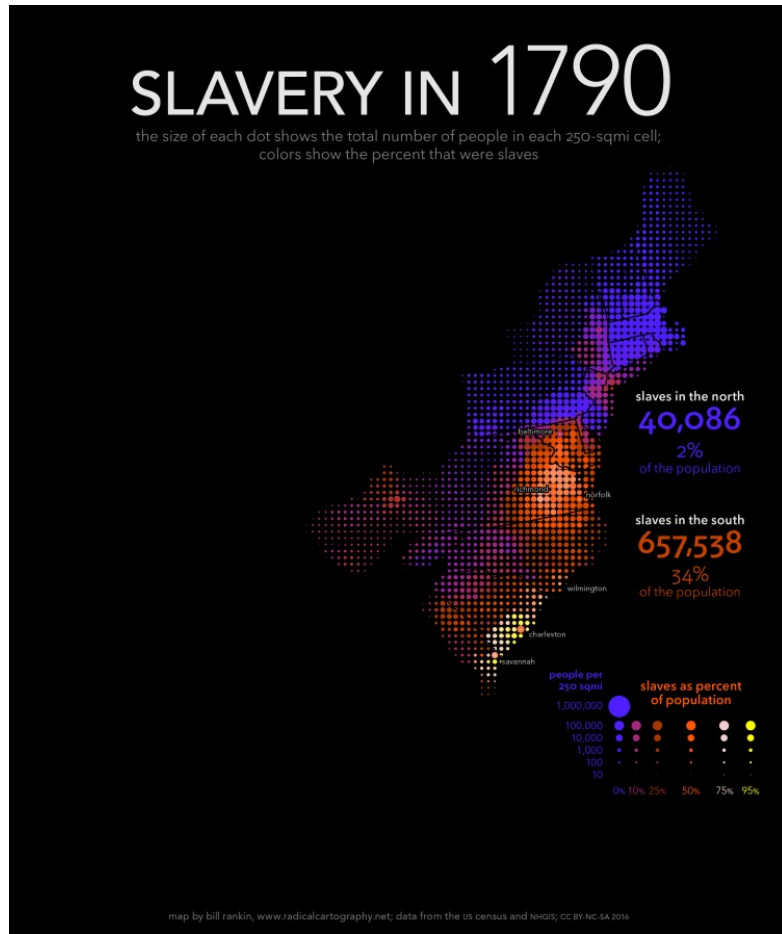


Eli Whitney's cotton gin patent

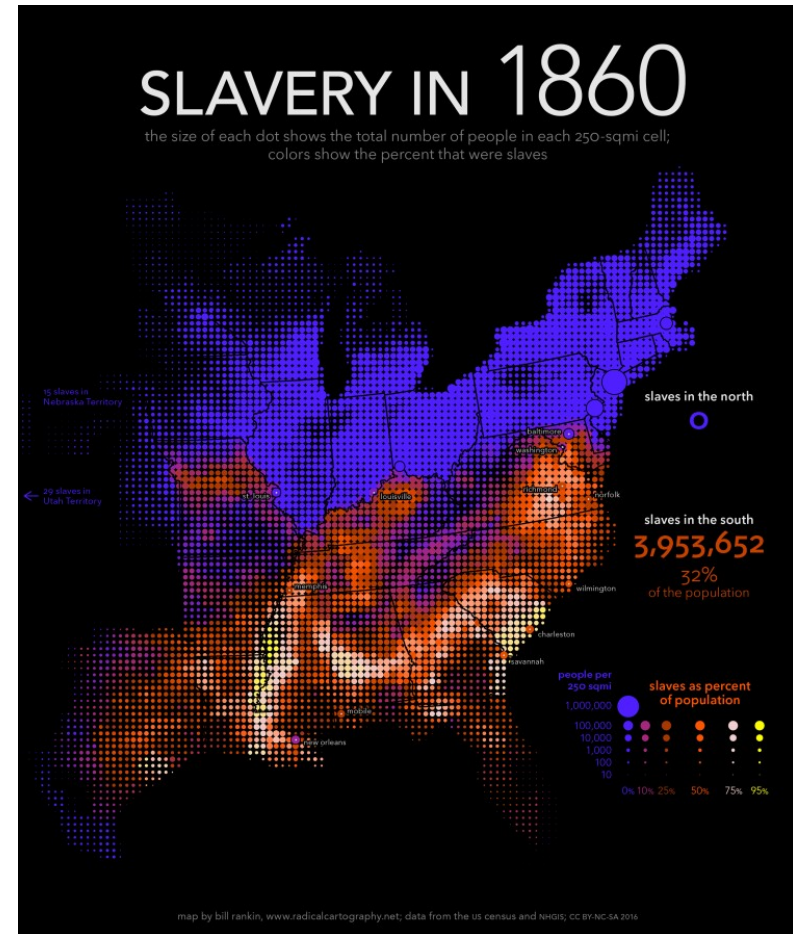
King Cotton



The Internal Slave Trade



Concentration of enslaved people in the US
in 1790.



Concentration of enslaved people in the US in 1860.

Source: radicalcartography.net

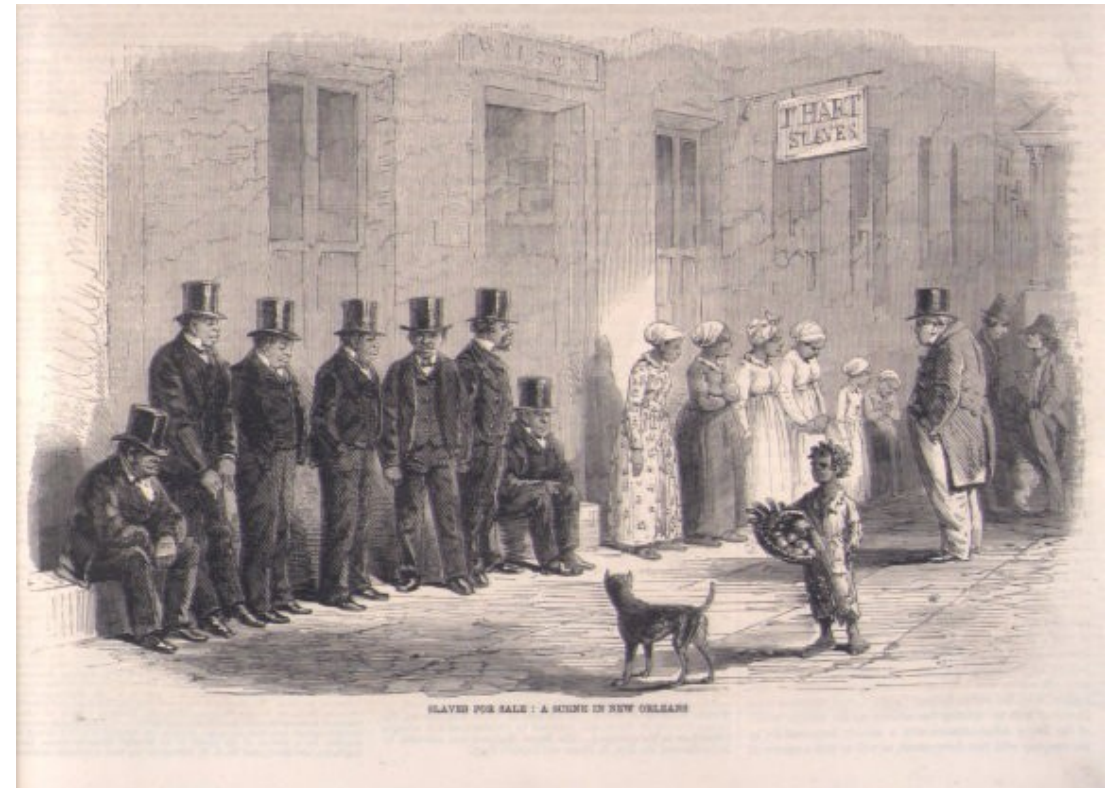
The Internal Slave Trade

- In 1808, the United States had banned the importation of enslaved Africans.
- By the early 1800s, Virginia and Maryland enslavers had more enslaved people than they wanted.
- Planters in the cotton country wanted more enslaved labor.
- As a result, 100,00s of enslaved people were sold from Virginia and Maryland to the Deep South, in particular, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

The Internal Slave Trade



People being sold to Tennessee from Virginia



People for sale in New Orleans, the main destination of the internal slave trade.

The Enslaver

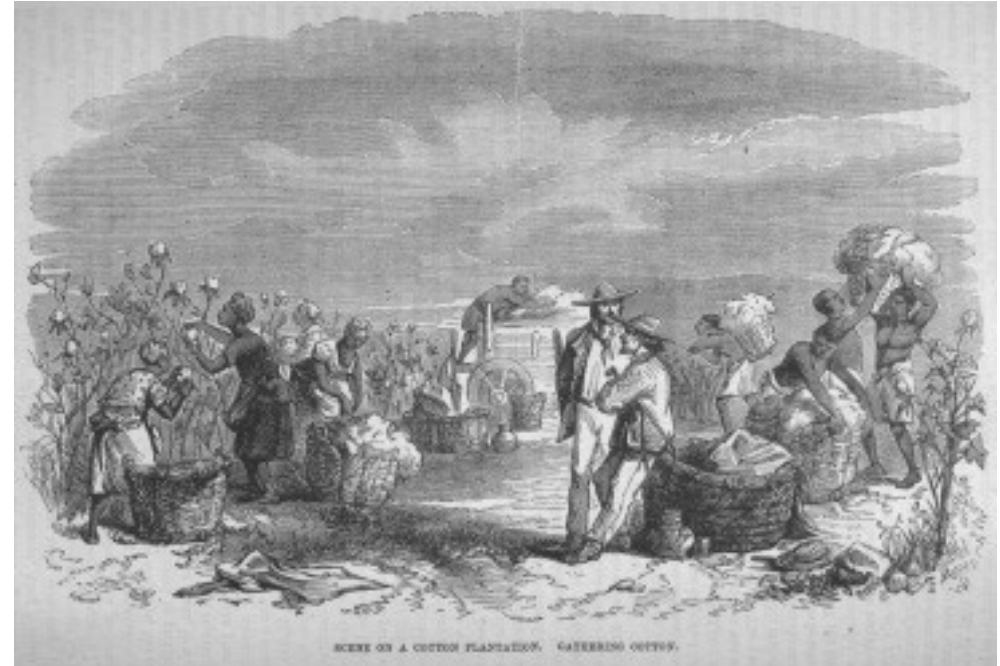
- The enslaver's personality and beliefs most determined an enslaved person's experiences.
 - Southern law and society recognized enslavers' virtually unbridged power.
- To have a humane enslaver could mean a hard but perhaps tolerable life.
- To have a harsh or sadistic enslaver could mean an impossible situation.



Painting titled "Virginian Luxuries," c. late 1700s

Labor

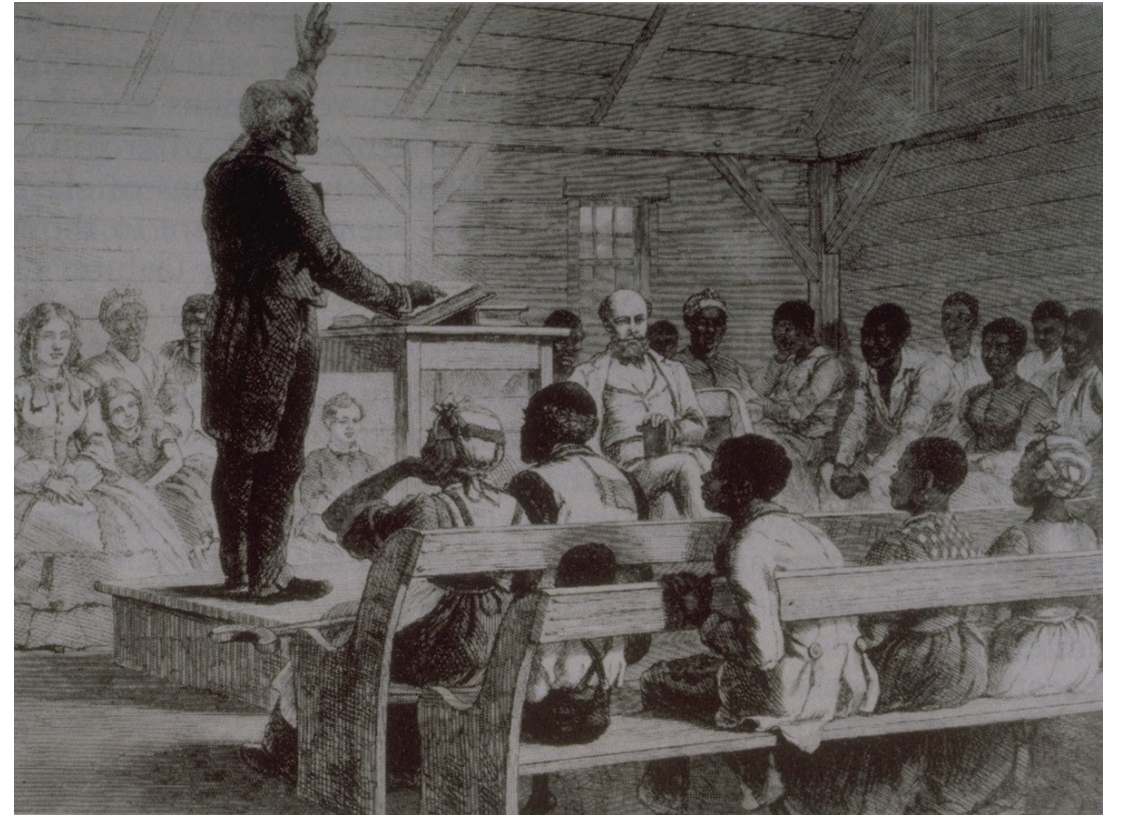
- Enslaved people did many different jobs.
- Most enslaved people worked in the fields.
- Most of these enslaved people lived on cotton plantations or farms.
 - People of all ages and both sexes worked in the fields.
- Work usually started at sunup and lasted until sundown.
- They usually worked in “gangs” under direct supervision.
- They worked under the threat of punishment.



Cotton Picking

Slave Culture: Religion

- By the Antebellum period most enslaved African-Americans were Christian.
- Enslavers' Christianity
 - A means of control
 - A justification for slavery
 - Emphasized obedience to worldly masters and the need for Christians to have a submissive character



The Christianity of the Enslaved

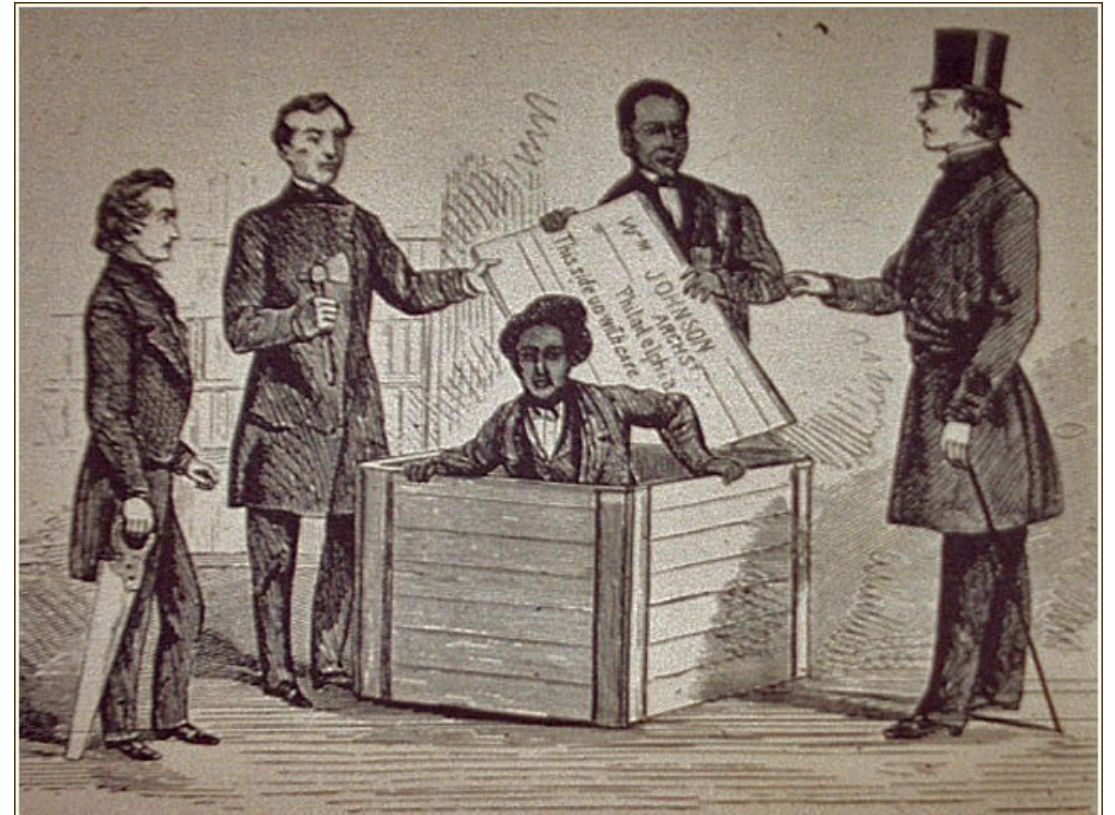
- Often combined Christianity with African beliefs and practices.
 - Services including shouting, dancing, and verbal exchanges between the congregation and preacher.
- Services often had to be held in secret.
- Emphasized the story of Exodus when God chose Moses to lead the enslaved Jews out of Egypt.
 - Slave Hymn: *Go Down Moses*
- Other popular figures (besides Jesus) were
 - Jonah, who escaped from the whale.
 - David, who slew the more powerful Goliath.
 - Daniel, who escaped from the lions' den.
- The enslaved also emphasized the Christian message of brotherhood and the equality of all believers.

Enslaved People's Politics

- Enslaved people did not accept the justness of slavery.
- By the Antebellum Period, enslaved people had developed an ideology of liberty.
 - This ideology was deeply rooted in and deeply influenced their Christian beliefs.
 - They were aware of and accepted the thoughts on equality and liberty unleashed by the American Revolution.
 - They concluded that slavery was a form of theft.
- Most enslaved people recognized the impossibility of confronting slavery directly.
 - Folk stories emphasized the weak and clever outwitting the strong.
 - Their hymns emphasized sorrow and the hope for ultimate freedom.
 - They also longed for escape from slavery, either through death, escape, or abolition.
 - *I'm Bound for the Land of Canaan*

Resisting Slavery

- Enslaved people
 - Were often “bad” workers.
 - Feigned illness to avoid work
 - “Stole” from enslavers
 - Committed arson, poisoned enslavers and overseers, and assaulted them
 - Ran away



Henry “Box” Brown

Revolts and Conspiracies

- In the United States, enslaved people conspired to rebel and on two occasions rose in armed revolt.
 - Gabriel's Rebellion, 1800, Virginia (actually a conspiracy)
 - The German Coast Insurrection, 1811, Louisiana
 - The Denmark Vesey Conspiracy, 1822, South Carolina
 - Nat Turner's Rebellion, 1831, Virginia
- Compared to other slave societies such events were rare.

The German Coast Insurrection, 1811

- Occurred on the Mississippi River upriver from New Orleans in January, 1811.
- Between 200 and 500 slaves armed with a motley array of weapons marched downriver towards New Orleans.
- As they marched, they killed two white planters and destroyed plantation houses.
- Whites fled into the swamps or to New Orleans.
- We do not know the slaves' motivations.



Laplace, La was built on the plantation where the revolt began.

The German Coast Insurrection, 1811

- Whites successfully put down the revolt.
- Whites summarily executed many of the captured rebels and tried and executed others.
 - "Charles [Deslondes] had his hands chopped off then shot in one thigh & then the other, until they were both broken — then shot in the body and before he had expired was put into a bundle of straw and roasted!"
- Roughly 100 slaves were killed.



Destrehan Plantation where "trials" of the rebels were held.